

## North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies

---

Volume 32

Article 7

---

1-1-2013

Kreglinger, Gisela H. *Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination, and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction. (Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology)* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013. 250 pp. Print.

Thomas Gerold

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind>

---

### Recommended Citation

Gerold, Thomas (2013) "Kreglinger, Gisela H. *Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination, and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction. (Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology)* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013. 250 pp. Print.," *North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies*: Vol. 32 , Article 7.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.snc.edu/northwind/vol32/iss1/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. It has been accepted for inclusion in North Wind: A Journal of George MacDonald Studies by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ St. Norbert College. For more information, please contact [sarah.titus@snc.edu](mailto:sarah.titus@snc.edu).

**Kreglinger, Gisela H. *Storied Revelations: Parables, Imagination, and George MacDonald's Christian Fiction*. (Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology) Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013. 250 pp. Print.**

**Thomas Gerold**

**K**reglinger's *Storied Revelations* is the most recent of the three theological studies on George MacDonald published in the last few years. While Kerry Dearborn's *Baptized Imagination* and Thomas Gerold's *Die Gotteskindschaft des Menschen* are systematic studies of MacDonald's theology, Kreglinger tries a wider look at his work: She understands MacDonald "as a parabolic writer in the Jesus tradition" (207) and examines MacDonald's fantasies and fairy tale and his realistic novels in the context of the New Testament parables.

Kreglinger starts with a very short introduction into George MacDonald's life as a theologian and as poet. Then she looks at the parables of Christ and discusses their relation to metaphor and allegory. Neither the Church Father Augustine, with his very allegorical understanding of parables, nor 20<sup>th</sup> century New Testament scholars as Joachim Jeremias, Eberhard Jüngel and Janet Soskice, are forgotten.

According to Kreglinger parables are not strict allegories. They are short narrative fictions and point beyond themselves. God is never directly mentioned. Parables start in a familiar world, but go on in a surprising and perhaps even shocking way. But through this surprise they help the reader to understand God in a new way. To Kreglinger, there are two possible problems or issues with parables: either a reader cannot understand the world of the parable anymore or the reader is so used to the surprising element (e. g., that the Samaritan is the one who helps and not the priest or the Levite) that there is no new understanding of God anymore.

Kreglinger then examines the relation between MacDonald and Romanticism. Influences such as Novalis allow MacDonald to integrate the physical and the spiritual world. The image of the night, for example, is seen as something positive, which connects to Christ's revelation and the understanding of the poet as priest. Kreglinger's discussion of the *Hymnen an die Nacht*, in particular, is illuminating.

Another important influence that Kreglinger examines is Coleridge. While MacDonald used some elements of Coleridge thinking, argues Kreglinger, he often modified—or more exactly, Christianized them. MacDonald, like Coleridge, believes the poet is completely distinct from the creator: the poet finds truths, but does not make them; the poet combines what he or she has discovered in an new way, and the “works of imagination are new embodiments of old truths” (97), not new creations.

In the chapter “George MacDonald’s Theological Rationale for Story and the ‘Parabolic,’” Kreglinger discusses MacDonald’s understanding of revelation and scripture. The final revelation of God is Christ. Therefore, to MacDonald, revelation is always relational. Revelation changes the recipient; it transforms him or her into the being God meant to be. For MacDonald, writes Kreglinger, “Christ as the revealer must not be seen in opposition to creation” (131) since the creation was made through Christ and provides the material for speaking about the unseen world. Christ takes images from creation to speak about divine things, e. g., the salt or the light or the earth. These images from creation, consequently, speak about the Father (whom Christ only truly knows) makes Christ, according to MacDonald, the Poet-King.

Yet as Kreglinger points out, the parables of Christ are in danger of losing their revelatory power because readers become too familiar with them. One solution, then, is, to use these very familiar images and symbols in a new way. MacDonald does that in his stories, which are for MacDonald, argues Kreglinger, “parabolic” writings. An example is *The Light Princess*. The princess finds reality neither in metaphysical speculation nor in science, but in self-giving love. The drowning in water and the wine and biscuit, with which the prince is fed, associate the Baptism and the Eucharist, and show a close connection to Christ and his death.

In her final major chapter Kreglinger reads MacDonald’s (perhaps) most difficult work *Lilith* as “parabolic” writing. Her reading is a completely new interpretation. From a work where many MacDonald scholars find little scant references to Christ at all, Kreglinger argues for the Christocentric nature of the story—*Lilith* is written according to the same principles as the parables of Jesus. Images and symbols such as the night and especially death are used in a new—and even shocking —way, but so the reader has to remain open to the “parabolic” meaning of this story, thus entering into a process which transforms the reader. For me Kreglinger’s interpretation of *Lilith* is a very convincing one as it helps readers to understand on a deeper level the symbolic elements such as the use of the Eucharistic bread and wine. Her reading helps reader see how *Lilith*, far from being an outlier in his canon, is integrated in the whole of MacDonald’s writing and thinking.

Kreglinger’s *Storied Revelations* is a great work of scholarship.

First, the book demonstrates how connected MacDonald the creative writer is to MacDonald the theologian. Kreglinger convinces the reader that MacDonald is a great spiritual theologian. Her interpretation of *Lilith* will open up new lines of interpretation and discussion and become an essential part of MacDonald scholarship. Second, her study helps readers better understand the parables of the New Testament—to look at them in the context of MacDonald’s writing opens parables up to a new light, not only for the preacher but for the general reader of the New Testament. *Storied Revelations* is a great theological study and should be read by anyone who has an interest in MacDonald.